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Apertures onto Egypt: Lee Miller's Nomadic Surrealism¹

Patricia Allmer

A photograph taken in Egypt in 1935 shows Lee Miller holding a Rolleiflex camera. While her face immediately creates associations with her identity as a significant model in the worlds of fashion and art, she is also represented here as a professional photographer, and as an international citizen – an American woman wearing an Arabic (male) headdress and holding a German Rolleiflex.



Figure 1: Unknown Photographer, Lee Miller Holding her Rolleiflex Camera, Egypt 1935, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2012.
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Miller is constructed in several ways in this image – as a nomadic icon appropriating Western and Middle Eastern signifiers of power, and a figure whose international background and polyglot identity are defined by traveling and mobility. Her oeuvre, by extension, can be defined by the recording of spaces that can also be characterized as ‘nomadic’. These spaces are in transition, and range from the shifting sandscape of the desert, to fashion as a system of mobile, semiotically shifting surfaces, and the shifting national and international territories and deterritorialisations of the War front.

Conventional criticism has approached Miller’s photographs of Egypt mostly chronologically, repeatedly regarding these images as specific to a distinct period in her career and specific to her biographical/psychological circumstances. For example, Haworth-Booth describes Miller’s famous photograph of the Egyptian desert, *Portrait of Space* (1937), as a “representation of her psychological state” (139).



Figure 2: Lee Miller, *Portrait of Space*, Nr Siwa, Egypt 1937,
© Lee Miller Archives, England 2012. All rights reserved.

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Miller moved to Cairo in 1934, after marrying the wealthy Egyptian Aziz Eloui Bey in 1931, but found life amongst the high-society there boring, as she writes in a letter from 9 November 1937 to Roland Penrose: "MY God I'm so bored here! I think that I am slowly going mad---- [...]" She repeatedly escaped via long treks into the desert from "Mount Sinaie and Petra, Transjordanian and Palestine" (letter to Penrose, 31 May 1938). *Portrait of Space* is not conceived, in such a reading, as bearing any relation to or indeed constituting an integral part of Miller's wider intellectual and artistic projects. As this essay will demonstrate, mainly through an extended analysis of *Portrait of Space*, by mapping such spaces, Miller's art explores and focuses on the breakdown of monolithic structures and the emergence from this breakdown of alternative formations, opening up and revealing new, potentially nomadic spaces and demonstrating how art becomes, in Rosi Braidotti's words, a "resistance tactic" (255) geared against colonial and patriarchal ideologies. Through a close reading of *Portrait of Space* I will explore some of these "tactics" in Miller's work.

Miller's photographs of Egypt invite readings that focus on intellectual, political and philosophical contexts, and they also demand exploration in relation to and in the context of the wider Western tradition of representing Egypt (another context which has not received due attention in writings on Miller's Egyptian photography). This tradition, in which photography was highly complicit, promoted the European colonization of Egypt. It includes Napoleon's *Description de l'Egypte* (1809), an encyclopedic account including almost three thousand illustrations of ancient Egyptian ruins, landscapes and artifacts; publications such as *Egypt Through the Stereoscope*, containing 100 stereoscopic views produced by the American Keystone View Company in 1900; and the work of photographers such as Francis Frith, Hippolyte Arnoux and Félix Bonfils. Under the auspices of gathering and recording knowledge, these representations "dissected" and performed a "colonizing autopsy" (Gregory 207) on Egyptian space in order to master it; often the "essence of Egypt" was shown as "the ruin and the archaeological site" (Osborne 24).

In particular, Western photography of Egypt constructed hierarchical relations between the Egyptian Orient and the European Occident, as Gregory suggests: "photographic representations worked to naturalize the colonizing propensities of Orientalism through archaeologies of truth that rendered Egypt as a series of transparent spaces open to the Occidental gaze" (Gregory 224). The photographic practices and assumptions establishing these power relations were furthermore, as Gregory notes, "profoundly masculinist," being intricately bound to the wider patriarchal discourse which purveys the colonialization, conquering and mastery not only of spatial territories, but also of women as territories, rendering both, Egypt and women's bodies, as "transparent space[s] that could be fully 'known' by the colonial [and patriarchal], colonizing gaze" (196).

This essay will argue that, unlike other photographers' colonial constructions of Egypt as exoticised other, Miller's photographs offer distinct and innovative apertures onto Egypt, revealing and critiquing the very constructions that previously defined photography's versions of the country. They open up perspectives onto conventional Western colonial and patriarchal ideological notions of frontiers, identities, power and their monolithic structures, notions not least inherent in and constructed by the history of Western art. *Portrait of Space* is here regarded as an example of Miller's wider exploration of the breakdown of such ideological structures, and the emergence from this breakdown of alternative formations that open up and reveal new, potentially nomadic spaces. This reading will also argue that Miller's surrealism is focused less on (for example) bringing together contradictory realities, but is instead located, or rather dislocated, in nomadic moments of in-betweenness, flux, displacement and dispersion – moments which can be traced along the folds, tears and creases, disruptions and flaws in the structural monoliths of patriarchal and colonial ideology and space.

Taken on a trip in 1937, *Portrait of Space* depicts a window view from a tent (itself signifying, as Katharine Conley argues, "nomadic mobility" [48]), through a torn mosquito net, onto the Siwa desert landscape. The photograph shows a world destructured, in the process of a disintegration evident most clearly in the tears and frazzled ends and folds of the net. While a main focus of the photographic colonial venture of (re-)possessing Egypt was to represent its landscapes as romanticized monumental spaces "unspoiled" by contemporary life, the landscape in *Portrait of Space* is barren, and the desolate state of the window and the net contradicts notions of unspoiledness – instead constructing an exhausted artificial surface.

The immediate landscape exposed by the tear reveals further human traces. A small territory has been rolled flat and is rudimentarily mapped out by stones that have been arranged in lines, forming part of an apparently rectangular delineated space, a shape inscribed on the sandscape. This linearity and flattened space stands in contrast to other, uncontainable lines of the desertscape, lines on the sandscape which crisscross and spread seemingly aimlessly in different directions, and which are reflected in the tear and in the cloud formations. The lines of stones suggest a frontier, marking out a property, discerning the inside of man-made space from the outside of the desert. This straight stony line appears ironic and absurd, in the face of the sprawling desert. It reveals the futility of marking territory or property against the open landscape, a landscape which, far from being neutral, was itself colonized historically by the imposition of straight lines demarcating notional 'national' borders and distinguishing politically-defined territories on maps. Space in *Portrait of Space* is always already political, marked by the photograph's affinities with such maps; it portrays a scene set in a colonized discourse.

Another distinctive aspect of this apparently 'human' space contained by lines of stones is its flatness, in contrast to the unevenness of other surfaces and spaces in the image: desert, tear and sky. Civilization's limit is here not only mapped out by the stony line, but also by a seeming track or path on the left which stretches only a few feet before losing itself, flowing into and becoming part of the desert landscape; a track or path whose origins are furthermore ambivalent, as it might be a wadi, a dry river bed. Civilization and its organization, marked by the linear boundary and the track, is here in the process of becoming-other, on the brink of being deterritorialized by difference, a non-structure which sprawls, moves and disorganizes.

Here we are at the brink, at the nodal point between civilization and its demise – a version of a kind of space which Miller explored throughout her oeuvre. The even, ordered line which maps out the vanishing, rather than the persistence, of man-made territory evokes other lines in her work which trace out the demise of the reliability of stable territories. Such lines occur in historical maps found in Miller's book collection, a substantial part of which consisted of travel books showing maps of ancient, fallen civilizations and their now vanished territories, for example Charles W. Mead's *Old Civilisations of Inca Land* (a book she owned from 1924), which shows a map that marks out territories no longer existing, shifted, reconfigured. Here the map marks out territory as unstable; the lines in maps are temporary rather than fixed outlines.²

The breakdown of civilizations and their territories is a recurrent focus in Miller's work. Her Egypt photographs explore the remains of fallen Egyptian and Roman civilizations; her Second-World War photographs map out the downfall of the Third Reich, its deterritorialization poignantly revealed metonymically in discarded maps which repeatedly occur in these photographs, such as in her famous 1945 photograph of the wife and daughter of the city treasurer of Leipzig after their suicide. There a map, possibly of Leipzig, lies next to the foot of the body of the daughter, suggesting that the territory of the Third Reich has symbolically broken down and been discarded. Similarly in another photograph of 1945 showing *Sgt. Art Peters on Hitler's Bed* a discarded, frayed map lies on the floor. The maps and their lines conventionally and ideologically demarcate and fix territory here, rather than asserting its persistence; they act as *mementos mori*, revealing the imperistence and frailty of territory. Territorial lines disperse and become meaningless, like the many rhizomic traces, tracks and cracks Miller repeatedly photographed in the desert sands and surfaces.

Portrait of Space clearly indicates in its title the processes undertaken by Miller's photography. The subject of the ostensible portrait has vanished from the visual field and only emerges in evocations, in connotations and the formal features of the photograph – the portrait format, the word portrait in the title, and the cloud vaguely resembling lips beside the two hills on the right of the horizon in the image, which seemingly resemble a pair of



Figure 3: Lee Miller, *Suicides in Town Hall*, Leipzig, Germany 1945, © Lee Miller Archives, England 2012. All rights reserved. www.leemiller.co.uk.

eyes, a resemblance evoking a line in David Gascoyne's 1932 poem *Roman Balcony*: "the deserts where enormous Eyes stare out of the Sand into the Sky" (82). This dimension works also through the portrait format of the frame which is sewn into the net, framing the space of the sky, and the cloud formation which evokes Man Ray's painting *Observatory Time – The Lovers* (c. 1931). Painted in landscape format, this painting offers an image of Miller's lips looming large in a cloudy sky. This painting is arguably part of Man Ray's own dissection of Miller's body (in the form of repeatedly including representations of fragments of Miller's body in his works), echoing the colonial dissection of the Egyptian landscape into archaeological fragments mentioned above.

The portrait in *Portrait of Space* exists only as a connotation echoed in, but absent from the photograph, which opens up space to the discovery of a multiplicity of possible 'portraits' within its frames. *Portrait of Space* mixes

the genres of portrait and landscape, drawing one into the other, subject into object. Space, the topic of landscape, becomes here the focus of a portrait, covertly critiquing the patriarchal portraiture tradition that transforms female subjects into portrayed objects, into places to be territorialized, mapped out and conquered. The space of a portrait becomes here a 'portrait of space'.

Portrait of Space deploys a multiplicity of framing devices, constantly asking which of these devices, in the absence of an actual sitter, frames a 'portrait of space'? Is it the tear which opens up onto the sandscape, revealing a pair of eyes? Is it the dark portrait-format frame, hanging on threads in the net, which frames the space of the sky? Is it the stony territorial line itself, the rectangular shape which seems to mirror the shape of the dark frame in the netting? Or is it the other dark frame which runs at the edge of the photograph, framing the whole image? And there are more frames, frames within frames, manifest in the thousands of small holes in the grid of the netting, which assemble to constitute larger frames, which in turn come together to form still larger frames when viewed against the scenes they overlay. *Portrait of Space* is in one sense a complex *mise en abyme* in which notions of inside and outside are endlessly placed and displaced.

Anne Friedberg, writing of Leon Battista Alberti's treatise on painting, argues that it proposes that accurate perspective is achieved through a rectangular frame for which the window is a metaphor. The frame, as Friedberg notes, "was to be used to position the viewer in relation to its perspectival construction of space [...] the artist and the viewer of the painting were in a fixed position in relation to the picture plane" producing the "immobility of the viewer", the "relation of a fixed viewer to a framed view" (12, 27-28). The rectangular frame here assigns fixed positions and asserts immobility. It acts as a boundary between the viewer and her (objectivized) other. Similarly Jacques Derrida identifies conventional notions of the frame as something that separates, keeps apart, marks one from the other. He argues that *parerga* "have a thickness, a surface which separates them not only [...] from the integral inside, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung [...]" (*Truth* 60-61). The frame, considered within this philosophical tradition, conventionally marks a basic separation, an ontological cut between what lies inside it and outside it. Like the stony line on the ground in *Portrait of Space*, the rectangular frame marks out territory, creating a device to distinguish, to draw a line between inside and outside, one and the other.

In *Portrait of Space* the modes of operation of this traditional framing device are challenged. While the stony line on the ground suggests, in relation to the desert, a tension between permanence and mutability, so too does the rectangular frame working in relation to the torn netting, from which it literally only hangs by threads. Gilles Deleuze argues that Renaissance perspective "has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective,

and in consequence also a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilizes and moves nothing" (*Difference* 67). The frame's construction of Renaissance perspective is here challenged by the tear as a framing device, spreading across the picture plane. In contradistinction to the frame, the tear diverges and decenters. Its centrality is marked by mobility, by its opening up of and onto space, into which it lures the viewer's gaze. The tear, as Deleuze argues, "runs its course in a continuous, imperceptible, and silent way [...]. That which it transmits does not allow itself to be determined, being necessarily vague and diffuse. [...] [I]t always takes an oblique line, being ready to change directions" (*Logic* 362). The tear causes movement which "implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation [...]" (*Difference* 67).

The tear in the net in Miller's photograph offers an alternative perspective on 'reality', proposing that reality can be perceived not from the 'window' of tradition, but from a spreading anti-structure, a nomadic migration of form and containment, into that which is unstable and cannot be contained. Perspective, in the nomadic space opened up by the tear, can no longer be fixed, and neither can the viewer or the view, as both are constantly positioned and repositioned, depending on the seemingly random, uncontainable spread of the fragile textile.

The tear here resembles, furthermore, a number of bodily orifices, gateways between inside and outside. It resembles the shape of an eye, perhaps marking a new way of looking at the world and a new way of the world looking back at us in turn, offering openings which are penetrable from both sides, evident in the light which floods in from the outside into the inside of the hut through the tear, rather than constructing a boundary which marks subject from object. The tear in Miller's photograph also resembles the uneven shape of a vagina, a broken hymen. According to Derrida the hymen is a protective screen, an invisible veil, standing between inside and outside, between its connotations of virginity and matrimonial consummation: "What counts here is the *between*," Derrida remarks, "the in-between-ness of the hymen" (*Dissemination* 222). The tear in this photograph intimately draws together looking and framing as feminized activities that construct a feminized space, perhaps proposing this as an alternative to the linear spaces of frontiers and boundaries associated with patriarchy, and, of course, colonialism.

The nomadic space of the tear draws the viewer's gaze to explore its folds and crevices, inviting what Deleuze and Guattari call "haptic rather than optical perception. [...] It is an intensive rather than extensive space, one of distances, not of measures and properties". It reveals a space which "is occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities [...]. The creaking of ice and the song of the sands" (479). The tactile

quality of the tear in Miller's photograph evokes Caravaggio's painting *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (c. 1601-02), where the tear in St Thomas's cloak mirrors the eroticized and feminized presentation of Christ's gaping wound, marking the passage between inside and outside of the divine body, which St Thomas is touching. The wound, mirrored by the tear, is the site of truth of Christ's transformation and becoming. Truth in Caravaggio's painting is located neither inside nor outside, but in the passage between the two; truth is in-between, emerging out of the opening of a space, of a literal and figural dislocation.

The tear's edges are frayed, uneven, consisting mainly of the mobile folding, refolding and unfolding of the torn material. Here the material twists over and wraps around itself, multiplying its surface, creating new spaces and new geometries of its representation. In some places, as in the large fold at the bottom left-hand corner of the image, the overlapping of the material changes the grid-like appearance of the netting – the overlaying of different layers of grids has here produced wave-like lines, deterritorializing the organizational structure of the linear grid.

The tear's production of folds further challenges the boundaries set by the frame. The fold adds layers, shifts surfaces, endlessly folding the outside in and the inside out, rendering meaningless notions of boundaries and frontiers between inside and outside, surface and depth, appearance and essence. The fold, in Deleuze's conception, "announces that the inside is nothing more than a fold of the outside" (Parr 103). Inside and outside are here folded into a continuous texturology. The fold creates the difference that, for Deleuze, "endlessly unfolds and folds over from each of its two sides and that unfolds the one only while refolding the other" (*The Fold* 33-34). It is a "coextensive unveiling and veiling" (34) – when one side veils, the other one reveals – surface produces depth, and vice versa.

However, ultimately even the notion of a distinct inside and outside in *Portrait of Space* is challenged once we shift our point of view away from the center of the image to the margins of the tear – from the folds to the creases. There is an accumulation of creases in this photograph, creases whose shadings are reminiscent of charcoal lines, adding pictorial elements of shading and dimensionality to this apparently straightforward photographic image. These creases are, in particular, prominent on the left and right side of the tear, creating erotic lines and forkings, accidental, automatic lines. While a crease's forkings on the left are reminiscent of the erotic, crotch-like folding of fingers in Max Ernst's *At the First Clear Word* (1923), a thick dark line, evocative of palmistry, runs prominently down at the right side of the tear. These creases create volume, introducing a three-dimensional element of perspective into this two-dimensional photograph.

Shifting our gaze, our perspective, away from the perspectival focal point of the landscape to the crease, suddenly introduces a disturbing, familiar painterly element, recalling the painted creases in cloths and veils used in

trompe l'œil to evoke the appearance of three-dimensionality, the very artifice which leads us to believe that the scene is real. One is reminded of the story of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, in which Parrhasius wins a competition in painting the more realistic artwork. As Paolo Pinto narrates in *Dialogo di pittura* (1548): "Eager to see the work, which seemed but was not, Zeuxis approached the painting and tried to take hold of the painted veil, whereupon he admitted his defeat by the rival's ingenuity" (Pardo 327-28).

Once we've shifted our gaze, the *trompe l'œil* elements in this photograph proliferate, offering further interrogations of the conventional frame, ultimately breaking it. They are present in the multiplying framing devices which strangely transform and constantly shift notions of 'real' and 'artifice'. The thick wooden window frame running along the margin of the photograph frames the scene internally, evoking internal framing devices of *trompe l'œil* paintings, already offering the image as a representation of a representation. This frame is doubled by the smaller frame within the photograph, which frames a cloud producing another representational frame within the frame. However, the frame and its ability to frame, to make inside distinct from outside, fail here – the frame cannot contain the cloud which runs from the inside of the frame onto the landscape outside of it. The conventional notion of the frame as enforcing a distinction between inside and outside here is challenged, as J. Hillis Miller comments on the prefix of *para* in *parergon*, the 'beyond the work':

'Para' is a double antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority [...] something simultaneously this side of a boundary line, threshold or margin, and also beyond it [...]. A thing in "para" [...] is [...] simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and out. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside. It confuses them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them and joining them. (219)

Yet, on a further level this 'outside' of the frame, i.e. reality as distinct from representation, is itself questioned once we shift our gaze to the tear and its creases as a further framing device – the *trompe l'œil* creases in the fabric transform this outside into a flat surface, as if the material would have been pasted onto this surface, rendering the inside as that which is real, and the outside (the desert space, that which conventionally has been represented as 'untouched') as artifice. The gap in the net turns from an opening onto reality into, in Jean Baudrillard's words, "A hole in reality, an ironic transfiguration, an exact simulacrum hidden at the heart of reality, and on which the latter depends for its functioning" (65-66).

This fluctuation of 'real' and 'artifice' generically evokes the aesthetic play of *trompe l'œil* simulation, offering another locus of mobility within the photograph. It seems to allude specifically to René Magritte's appropriations

of *trompe l'œil* in a number of his paintings of the 1930s and their subsequent reworkings, as for example *The Fair Captive* (1931) or *The Human Condition* (1933), where, on one level, the edge or a frame of an artwork can no longer delineate inside from outside, apparent representation from reality, as the representation of the painted artwork seems to be a continuation of the landscape outside of it.³ However, on a further level, the *trompe l'œil* element of the painted edge of a canvas, or a painted frame to deceive the eye into distinguishing between 'representation' and 'reality', simultaneously collapses these differences, unraveling a world of pure representation.

These *trompe l'œil* devices undo Renaissance perspective still further in this photograph. As Baudrillard argues, in *trompe l'œil* depth

appears to have been turned inside out. While the Renaissance organized all space in accord with a distant vanishing point, perspective in the *trompe l'œil* is, in a sense, projected forward. Instead of fleeing before the panoramic sweep of the eye (the privilege of panoptic vision), [...] [*trompe l'œil*] objects 'fool' the eye [...] by a sort of internal depth – not by causing one to believe in a world that does not exist, but by undermining the privileged position of the gaze. The eye, instead of generating a space that spreads out, is but the internal vanishing point [...]. Whence independent of the aesthetic pleasure, comes the uncanniness of the *trompe l'œil* – the strange light it casts on this entirely new, western reality which emerged triumphant with the Renaissance. The *trompe l'œil* is the ironic simulacrum of that reality. (63-64)

The *trompe l'œil* undermines panoramic vision, which as noted earlier was key in visual discourses on Egypt, establishing hierarchies and borders between the Occident and the Orient and evident, for example in photographs of the Great Pyramid, such as Frith's *The Great Pyramid and the Sphinx* (1858), Arnoux's *Pyramide Cheops Sphinx et Caravan* (ca. 1860s) or Bonfils' *Great Pyramid at Cheops* (ca. 1880). Typically for colonial discourse these photographs show the landscape as a panorama, in order to produce detachment and otherness, as "a picture-world set apart from its observer" (Mitchell 23). At the same time these panoramic visions repeatedly suggest the mightiness of the pyramid as signifier of patriarchal power. Contrary to these photographs of the Great Pyramid, Miller's photograph *From the Top of the Great Pyramid* (1937) unties the pyramid's connotations as a locus of patriarchal power, and its symbolization of colonialization.



Figure 4: Lee Miller, *From the Top of the Great Pyramid*, Cairo, Egypt 1937,
© Lee Miller Archives, England 2012. All rights reserved.

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It shows the pyramid only indirectly, as a shadow overshadowing the landscape at its foot; Renaissance perspective is here represented as a shadow cast over the colonized land. The colonial gaze onto the pyramid is denied. The shadow, like the 'portrait' in *Portrait of Space*, connotes that which it represents, revealing it as an absence, rather than as a presence. While patriarchal power is criticized as that which looms large over the much smaller surrounding, it is also shown as powerless, being rendered into another signifier of transience and flux, namely a shadow.

The colonial discourse on the Egyptian landscape drew heavily on the "apparent accuracy of representation", of representation as a "mirror of truth" (Mitchell 22), evident for example in the *Art Journal's* announcement of Francis Frith's *Egypt and Palestine, Photographed and Described*, characterized as "an experiment in Photography...of surpassing value [...] for we will know that we see things exactly as they are" (cited in *ibid.*). The photograph read as mimetic representation of the real was particularly significant in this venture, as Gregory points out:

photographic representations worked to naturalize the colonizing propensities of Orientalism through archaeologies of truth that rendered Egypt as a series of transparent spaces open to the

Occidental gaze. Early daguerreotypes and calotypes were read not so much as traces or copies of the monuments but as virtually direct documents of an ancient past; the passage from the object in front of the lens to the image preserved in the photographic medium was seen intrinsically 'objective'. (224)

Arguably, *Portrait of Space* contradicts such colonial practices through its *trompe l'œil* elements which, as Baudrillard points out, mimic "the third dimension", thereby questioning the "reality of this dimension" (63). Miller re-presents the Egyptian landscape as removed from any viable notion of 'reality', showing that photography is always already caught up with and in its own inability to represent reality. The scenery presented by *Portrait of Space* is caught up through such counterpoints and connotations in endless movements and multiplications between veiling and revealing, only to fold back upon itself – rendering uncertain the concepts of outside and inside.

The *trompe l'œil* elements here break, literally disintegrate "hierarchical organization of space that privileges the eye and vision, of this perspectival simulation [...]"; they describe "a void, an absence, the absence of every representational hierarchy that organizes the elements of a tableau, or for that matter, the political order..." (Baudrillard 60). The *trompe l'œil* "rebounds onto the so-called 'real' world, to reveal that this 'reality' is naught but a staged world, objectified in accord with the rules of perspective," questioning whether "political space, the locus of power, is itself perhaps only an effect of perspective" (Baudrillard 63).

However, in this photograph the *trompe l'œil* creases are magnified by their proximity to a resting (or dead) desert fly situated close by the long dark crease on the right side of the net and clearly visible in enlarged versions of the photograph. The fly is another *trompe l'œil* device that introduces the painterly into the photographic. Here, the representation of the real becomes artifice, by the very method that represents artifice as real. The fly, sign of mortality (or, in the desert, of life?), implies the photograph's commentary on human hubris and the decline of civilisations, and imports into *Portrait of Space* a convention from a further genre, that of painterly still-life, extending the breakdown of generic boundaries.

Miller's exploration of literal 'tearing-apart' of Western perspective seems to go further in *Portrait of Space*. Alberti proposes a second framing device to produce a perspectival image. He suggests the use of a *velo*, a veil, as a "grid-like netting stretched on a frame", as he notes: "a veil loosely woven of fine thread, dyed whatever colour you please, divided up by thicker threads into as many parallel square sections as you like, and stretched on a frame. I set this between the eye and the object to be represented, so that the visual pyramid passes through the loose weave of the veil" (cited in Friedberg 38).

This grid-like structure of the veil served the artist to translate "the three-dimensional natural world onto the two-dimensional virtual plane of the

picture surface" (Friedberg 39), a device which Albrecht Dürer represents in an illustration of an artist drawing a nude published in his *The Painter's Manual* of 1525. This illustration has often been referred to in order to show the gender differences between the active, male, dressed holder (sitting upright) of focal-point perspective, and the object of the artwork, the female, naked, passive, reclining and immobile. Indeed the veil between artist and model is not itself a neutral device, but signifies strongly the Western construction of Woman as a play of surfaces, as Mary Ann Doane notes: "The veil...reduces all to a surface [...]" (56) – an act which is literal in Dürer's illustration.

Dürer's scene also seems to be evoked in Man Ray's *Untitled Photograph* from ca. 1929, which shows Miller seemingly captured behind a veil, gazing into the distance through a gridded curtain that she holds between herself and the photographer. The shadow of the window frame cuts across her throat, dissecting her body once more, dividing head from body, face from torso, locus of portrait from locus of bodyscape, subject from object, evoking representations of her where her head has been cropped. An ironic comment on this can perhaps be seen in Miller's 1940 photograph *Revenge on Culture*, where a thick black steel rod divides the head from the torso of a fallen, destroyed angel, itself seemingly resembling a sculptural representation of Miller. The photographic representations of Miller's iconic body by Man Ray and other male artists closely tie in with and continue the traditional representations of the female body as immobile, a tradition Braidotti notes: "From Aristotle to Freud, woman has been described as immobile, that is to say passive, or inactive" (256).

Perhaps *Portrait of Space* is a reply (from French *replier* meaning to turn back, to refold, to fold anew in the same or different forms) to these patriarchal, artistic constructions and uses of women. Here the veil is torn, the mirage gone, the erotic subject behind it seems to have left, dissolved, remaining only as a trace in the picture's title, in the shape-shifting spaces of the clouds which momentarily take on the form of lips, and the impermanence of the desert sand which temporarily resembles a pair of eyes, before dissolving again, suggesting that the veil itself was what in the first place constructed the representation of women as passive nudes, to be gridded up and mapped out. There never was a 'real woman' behind the veil.

Miller offers us here what Gillian Rose refers to as "a geography of corporealized space that does not entail solid shape, boundaries, fixity, property and possession [...]. It may be possible to embody a space that allows a different kind of betweenness" (254). The tearing allows us literally to 'see through' the deception, deterritorializing the bodies of women associated with landscapes to be mapped, measured and territorialised, and replacing them with what Markku Salmela calls the "barely mappable void of the desert" (133).

In conclusion, *Portrait of Space* tears apart not just the veil of perspective, but also the veil of ideology, an ideology present in and reinforced by the

territorialization and colonization of countries, in the establishment of hierarchies and the imposition of stable fixed national or gender identities. *Portrait of Space* opens perspective to a new kind of space, or rather unveils the potential for different perspectives, which it presents as mobile, nomadic, ungrounded. This new space is what could be defined as Miller's nomadic perspective on space, a perspective which destabilizes and promotes multiplicities offering, in Braidotti's words, a "form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (23).

Portrait of Space is an example of the focus of Miller's work on the exploration of nomadic spaces of in-betweenness, spaces and identities that are characterized by movement and change, by going not only across but beyond boundaries. Her explorations tie together space and identity, offering being as the experience of transition, fluid and marked by a radical non-belonging, while loci of power are revealed as fragile and shifting, challenging their conventional ideological representations as fixed and static. As *Portrait of Space* demonstrates, Miller's photographs propose tactics for deterritorializing ideology by identifying, focusing on and constructing spaces and identities that are always in transition and in-between. They seek out and capture moments of disintegration and disorganization, offering them as moments where myths of universality and totality are undone, and the underlying patriarchal and colonial structure revealed as shifting, just like the desert sand underneath a traveler's feet.

Here is also where Miller's 'nomadic surrealism' lies. The surrealism of *Portrait of Space* does not rest in the seeming morphosis of hills into eyes or of a cloud into lips, but in the vertigo produced by Miller's tactics, such as the introduction of *trompe l'œil* elements into a horizontal Renaissance perspective, questioning and challenging this perspective, rendering it unreal through the very medium which conventionally is regarded as asserting 'reality' through its mimetic qualities. Baudrillard compares *trompe l'œil* itself with surrealism: "They attack our sense of reality or functionality and, therefore, our sense of consciousness. They seek out the wrong or reverse side of things, and undermine the world's apparent factuality" (64). I therefore propose that a major emphasis of Miller's photographs rests on exploring the possibilities within nomadic subjectivities and points of view, working to redefine surrealism as the ultimate nomadic art form that exceeds all frontiers.

Notes

1. I am grateful for the generous support of the Philip Leverhulme Foundation, Antony Penrose and the team of the Lee Miller Archives, and for their permission to quote from Miller's unpublished letters.
2. Lee Miller's copy of Charles W. Mead's *Old Civilisations of Inca Land* is housed

at the Lee Miller Archives, Chiddingly, UK.

3. If Miller alludes to Magritte's *The Human Condition* in this photograph, Magritte used, according to David Sylvester and other scholars, *Portrait of Space*, which he saw at a visit in Roland Penrose's house in Hampstead in April 1938, as the basis for his *Le Baiser* (1938).

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